# Shared principles and individual bravery

**L**ast year the United States government declared war on world terrorism and defined as its enemy those who would endanger the lives of civilian populations for the purpose of securing political ends against foreign governments. In the wake of the September 11 attack on key US nerve centers there were few national governments that did not support President Bush's declaration. Since there is hardly a national government today that could not easily become the target of similar aggressive acts, only the US government's most bitter of enemies refused their support. Indeed, terrorism is the only effective tool available to small politically active groups whose political objectives are either ignored by general publics where political democracy exists, or squelched by national governments where it does not. Such groups are numerous and their justification for their aggressive activities is profound.

About the closest one can come to internationally acceptable forms of similar activity on the part of small militant groups is that which occurs when oppressive foreign and domestic governments impose themselves on local civilian populations, who lack the means to defend themselves either in open conflict or through established and generally accepted political processes. During Hitler's invasion of France at the outset of World War II, French civilians armed themselves not only against the German military presence, but also their own government, whom they believed had sacrificed their national sovereignty to the enemy. During this period of intense underground resistance military and governmental facilities became the targets of sabotage and other forms of civilian rebellion. One can easily imagine that many non-warring civilians lost their lives in these attacks.

Human beings are by their very nature a violent lot. We are born into the world in sheds of tears and pain, and many of us die of disease and accidents that bring upon us incredible suffering. More generally, our rules of law, customs, languages, and habits force us to engage in many activities that are difficult for us to accept without significant training, hardship, and sacrifice. This hardship sometimes results in painful wounds that for many of us never heal and eventually become insurmountable psychological barriers that cloud are thinking and inhibit our success. In addition to these seemingly universal human conditions much of the world is subject to degraded social, political, economic, and biological environments that impose far more agony and misery on us than anyone who is able to read this note has probably ever experienced. These degraded environments are the real tragedy of the human condition, as they represent a sense of grave, widespread, human injustice created by human beings.

Who is to blame for these conditions? It is the very same national governments who have unanimously joined in the war against global terror.

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In today's world nothing is free -- not the water we drink, not the space we occupy, not even the air we breath. Everything is either polluted or owned and managed by others who are paid to keep these basic necessities free of the conditions that have resulted in their pollution. These others are government bodies and private citizens whose wealth and property are protected by government. In short, with the exception of human companionship, which in the absence of proper medical care has become for many of us an issue of dire risk, all of life's necessities must be obtained from someone else. One must be prepared either to sacrifice one's income, or in the absence of income one's personal dignity. As there are few governments that guarantee their citizens jobs, and even fewer that provide sufficient, if any alternative sources of income in the absence of employment, many people are dependent on relatives, friends, and charitable organizations for their very survival.

The conditions of poverty and destitution found in small and large pockets of the industrially advanced nations of our world are magnified by several orders of ten in less industrially developed nations. Many of the governments responsible for these conditions were either established by former colonial powers, and/or are currently sustained by them, in order to achieve various economic and geo-political strategic objectives. In many cases these governments were neither born of revolutionary movements supported by their own peoples, nor the result of long social evolutionary processes specific to their own region; rather, they were established as a form of external imposition. As a result, their officials tend to be self-serving and are often not accountable to the larger populations whom they might otherwise serve.

Osama bin Laden's voice and that of other so-called world terrorists is a voice of desperation and massive global-wide social injustice extending far beyond the narrow, if not broad, confines of the Arabic world. For many the only alternatives to their misery are escape, crime, and self-destruction. To offset these miserable conditions the Islamic faith is an important source of social stability in the absence of established markets and market-complementing government institutions. Religion is for most, however, a poor substitute for basic nutrition, shelter, and good health.

In order to escape one's misery one must have either friends or means; moreover, there must be a place which offers better opportunity to which one can aspire and eventually reach. Even for those who do aspire attainment is more often than not an impossible dream. This leaves either crime or self-destruction. Because criminal activity jeopardizes one's relationships with family and friends, it threatens one's sole source of secure, albeit impoverished sustenance. Though suicide may relieve the misery of the individual, it brings sorrow to one's family and friends, and becomes a source of ridicule from one's enemies. Killing the enemy, on the other hand, is an act of courage, because it offsets the perceived, extreme, social and political injustice from which one can find no escape. Killing oneself along with the enemy achieves several important goals: it relieves oneself of one's own misery, ameliorates the sense of injustice felt by one's family and friends, and eliminates the economic burden for those on whom one once depended. Suicide bombings are surely a source of terror for those who are their potential targets, but they are hardly

cowardly acts to those who engage in them.

On the other hand, one can only wonder about the cowardly intentions of
government officials of industrially advanced nations who stand on the
side-lines, while the armored vehicles of friendly national governments
push their way into civilian towns and settlements of other peoples in the
name of security and the war against terror.

It is one thing to want to establish a new principle of world conduct for
all nations to follow; it is quite another to sit on one's hands, while
others whom one knows cheapen the principles that already exist. Terrorism
is an ugly phenomena, but so too are social misery and political injustice.
Allowing the Israeli-Palestine war to wage onward, is harming the war against
terror. Standing-by while the Israeli government is given a free hand to
raid civilian settlements in search of armed terrorists, can only deepen
the hatred and resentment of those who are not already armed. Under current
circumstances no action on the part of the governments of industrially
advanced nations is action in favor of Israel and against the war on terror.


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